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Nixon-CIA 350

WASHINGTON AP - President Nixon paid his first visit to the Central Intelligence Agency Friday, and joked about it.

"I usually say on these visits that it's a pleasure to be here," Nixon said. But, taking note of the tight secrecy that shrouds the CIA, he went on, "but since the CIA isn't supposed to be here, I guess I should say it's a pleasure not to be here."

Nixon rode a helicopter on the short flight from the White House to the agency in suburban Langley, Va., in one of a series of social calls he has paid to key agencies since becoming President.

Arriving at the modern headquarters building, the President was delighted to find hundreds of operatives—many of them women—awaiting him. He spent long minutes shaking hands in a scene reminiscent of campaign days, as admirers strained against the ropes separating them from the President. Hundreds more awaited him in the lobby, and the cheers they raised were a rare sound in the halls of the no-nonsense agency.

"I thought only men worked out here," the President said as he noted the predominantly feminine crowd of greeters.

In the presence of reporters—for whom a visit to the CIA was also a rare experience—he let slip what has been a closely guarded secret as he chatted with some of the girls outside.

"So there are 8,000 of you here," he said, apparently forgetting that the CIA is not eager to make public the size of its work force.

Nixon, in a 10-minute address to some 400 top agency personnel in the ultramodern CIA auditorium, had high praise for the organization that provides much of his morning reading on the state of the world.

"This organization has a mission that by necessity runs counter to some of the traditional idealistic feelings of this country," he said.

"Americans don't like war. Americans don't like secrecy or cold war. Consequently, when it becomes necessary to obtain intelligence information by an intelligence organization, many Americans are concerned about this.

"But it is necessary that those who make decisions at the highest level have access to the best facts. This agency is one of the great instruments of our government for the preservation of peace, the avoidance of war, the development of the kind of society where this kind of activity is not necessary at all."

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